

## **School Public Relations Plans** *(Courtesy of the National School Public Relations Association)*

The role of school public relations is to maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the school district and the many publics it serves. Each school district has its own unique way of carrying out this role, but there is one common element of all successful public relations programs: they are planned. A well-thought-out public relations plan will help ensure that a school district carries out its mission and meets its goals with the support of its staff and community. But where do you start? This tip sheet, developed from the resource files of the National School Public Relations Association, provides a basic framework process for developing a district public relations plan.

### **The four-step public relations process**

Exemplary public relations programs follow this basic four-step process:

- Research - up front analysis on where the district stands in regard to all publics it wishes to reach
- Action plan - developing public relations goals, objectives and strategies that go hand-in-hand with the district's overall mission and goals
- Communicate - carrying out the tactics necessary to meet the objectives and goals
- Evaluate - looking back at actions taken to determine their effectiveness and what changes are needed in the future

Keeping these four basic public relations tenets in mind, you can follow this step-by-step process in developing a public relations plan for your school district.

### **Public Relations Planning Process**

1. Variety assessment. Begin by meeting with the superintendent and school board to discuss their priorities for district public relations objectives. Know the district mission and goals and be prepared to discuss how your program can help achieve those goals.
2. Internal and external research. Before structuring the plan you must be aware of where the district stands in the eyes of both staff and the community. There are a variety of questions to answer: Who are our publics? What are our publics' overall perceptions of our schools? What "hot issues" are circulating among staff and community? What issues affecting other school districts may soon be coming our way?...the list goes on and on. Base your research on your district mission and goals and use several methods. Tactics to consider: national studies, census data, telephone logs, media reports, interviews with community opinion leaders, focus groups, written or telephone surveys.
3. Develop public relations goals and objectives. Thinking first and foremost about facilitating achievement of district goals, develop short-term and long-term public relations goals to accomplish. It is advisable to develop these with input from a committee representing board, staff, parents and outside community members. Remember, to make the objectives timed and measurable so you will know if you achieved them. Example: By the end of the school year, 75 percent of the district's teachers will be involved in projects to improve teacher/parent relations.
4. Identify target publics. These "targets" are the groups of people that need to be reached in order to achieve the goals. Primary publics are those most important to achieving goals. In schools, they are often students, staff and parents. Secondary publics are those who could be reached if money or time permit, or those who are indirectly reached by public relations tactics.
5. Identify desired behavior of publics. This is a critical step! In order for the plan to be successful, you must decide what you want the program to do. Do you want to provide information? Or do you want reinforce or change the behavior of certain publics? These questions must be answered before tactics are created.

6. Identify what is needed to achieve desired behavior. Using research data, decide what actions must take place to create the behaviors you desire. For example: You could find out by taking attendance that only 50 percent of the parents at your school attend the Fall Open House. The desired behavior is to increase this number. A follow-up written survey could help you identify the reasons 50 percent do not attend. Then you can decide what actions to take to change this percentage.
7. Create strategies and tactics for reaching publics. Strategies are overall procedures, like developing a media kit that provides general information about the school district. Tactics are the actions that must be taken to carry out the procedures, like writing the press release or printing the folder for the district media kit.
8. Put your plan on paper. This is where you develop the budget, create a timeline and assign responsibility for all strategies and tactics.
9. Implement the plan. After management/board approval, put your plan into action. Keep your committee involved, and prepare to refine along the way.
10. Evaluate your efforts. Using the same methods you used in the research phase, evaluate your plan. First, evaluate the planning process itself: what worked and what didn't. Continue to evaluate your program as it is implemented to determine what revisions may need to be made. Finally, measure your goals and objectives to determine whether you have reached them.

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